

Plenary Session - International Holocaust Remembrance Day
European Parliament President Roberta Metsola
27th January 2022
European Parliament, Brussels

Dear Ms Margot Friedländer,
Dear colleagues,

The horrors that took place in Auschwitz are unspeakable, but we must speak.

This is a day of remembrance. Today, the 27th January, marks our collective responsibility to remember the unspeakable atrocities committed towards all the victims of the Holocaust: 6 million Jewish people, the Romani people, the LGBTIQ communities, and many others that were stripped of their dignity, because of their ethnicity, identity, race, behaviours or because of their political or religious beliefs.

The Nazi regime callously murdered 17 million men, women and children and inflicted unimaginable suffering and pain on millions more, while others' silence stood complicit.

We remember those, that perished and those that survived.

Survivors burdened with unimaginable hardship.

Survivors such as Zilli Schmidt and Zoni Weisz, whom we are fortunate to have present with us online today.

We remember those that, to paraphrase the title of Margot Friedländer's book, had to 'Try to make a life' in a world that tried to completely annihilate them and their families.

How low humanity sank.

On Holocaust Remembrance day, we remember crimes committed against humanity in the past, but we also remember the importance to speak up, in the present.

United in diversity, we speak up against Holocaust deniers, against conspiracy myths, against disinformation and against violence of every kind that target and single out members of our communities.

Because, despite decades of effort, we have not yet done enough to combat discrimination. In recent years, across Europe, anti-Semitic attacks are increasing and our children are no exception to this violence. Only two days ago, a twelve year old boy from Livorno, in Tuscany was insulted, kicked and spat on, simply because he is Jewish.

Fear still exists, because anti-semitism still exists, and because the fundamental right to be free from discrimination irrespective of gender, race, ethnic origin or sexual orientation is threatened daily.

We cannot allow complacency. We cannot allow impunity for acts of hatred that instil fear in members of our communities.

Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel said: “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides.”

And the European Parliament will always take a side: the side of respect, the side of human dignity, the side of equality. The European Parliament will never be silent. And today, we lit up the European Parliament in honour of all the victims of the Holocaust.

We must consciously act every day, and in whatever we do, to ensure that our communities are not marginalised by exclusion, hatred and indifference. And we must learn and we must educate.

The 2005 United Nations resolution that designated the 27 January as the international commemoration day in memory of Holocaust victims, also emphasises the importance of educating about Holocaust history; so that the darkest chapter of European history never, ever repeats itself.

The United Nations resolution calls for actively preserving all Holocaust sites that served as Nazi death camps, concentration camps, forced labour camps and prisons. And these sites, as we’ve seen, offer history lessons in themselves. Sites, such as the Alsace-Moselle-Memorial in Schirmeck - just a few kilometres away from the European Parliament’s official seat in Strasbourg - where, through knowledge and education, current and future generations can learn about the hunger, thirst, disease, violence and death that were part of the everyday life of Holocaust victims. And they can never learn to ever forget.

Today, we mark 77 years, since the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. A liberation from evil, that signalled that there was still hope.

The European project was built as a political manifestation of ‘Never Again’. A response to the horrors of The Third Reich with the ambition to integrate democratic countries together in the hope for a better future.

It stemmed from the bold ideal that strength could be extracted from tragedy. That from the ashes of our common history, we could forge a common destiny. A destiny where the values of peace, fairness, openness and cooperation could be instilled in us all. Because this is OUR Europe.

And today, it is truly an honour for this European Parliament to welcome Holocaust survivor, Margot Friedländer.

Your life-long commitment to combat discrimination, through initiatives like the Margot Friedländer Award that supports young people in standing up against modern day forms of anti-Semitism, racism and exclusion; and your life-long dedication in sharing the message of your life is an inspiration to us all.

And for this we thank you.

40 years ago, Simone Veil held the same role that I hold today. The first President of a democratically elected European Parliament was herself a former inmate of Auschwitz-

Birkenau. And so, this responsibility that we must carry, as a House of democracy is not only institutional, but also deeply personal. And we will honour the legacy of the Holocaust victims:

By never forgetting.

By never being complacent.

And by always, always speaking up.